

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CCO-00 HA-05 CIAE-00 NSAE-00
NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 SSM-03 IO-13 OPR-02 /083 W
-----024077 171206Z /16

O R 171030Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7133
INFO SIT-REP COLLECTIVE
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER
USNMR SHAPE BELGIUM
CINCUSNAVEUR, LONDON ENG
CINCUSAFE RAMSTEIN AB GER
COMSIXTHFLT
CTF SIX ZERO
CTF SIX ONE
CTF SIX TWO
CTG SIX ZERO PT TWO
FICEURLANT NORFOLK VA
FOSIF ROTA SPAIN
DIA WASHDC
CINCUSAREUR HEIDELBERG GER
USDOCOSOUTH NAPLES IT

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 1437

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PINT, MILI, ASEC, LE
SUBJECT: LEBANESE SITUATION, MARCH 17, 1200 HOURS LOCAL

REF: BEIRUT 1403 (DTG 161125Z MAR 78)

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. ISRAEL CONTINUES TO CONSOLIDATE ITS
POSITION IN SOUTH LEBANON. ARMED MILITIA APPEARED ON THE
STREETS OF WEST BEIRUT THE EVENING OF MARCH 16 BUT WERE
NOT IN EVIDENCE THE FOLLOWING MORNING. REFUGEES FROM THE
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SOUTH HAVE BEEN ILLEGALLY OCCUPYING APARTMENTS IN WEST
BEIRUT. CAMILLE CHAMOUN AND PIERRE GEMAYEL HAVE BLAMED
THE PALESTINIANS FOR THE ISRAELI INCURSION. PARLIAMENT
MET BUT WAS UNABLE TO AGREE ON A RESOLUTION ON THE
ISRAELI ATTACK. END SUMMARY.

2. MILITARY SITUATION.

A. ISRAEL CONTINUES TO CONSOLIDATE ITS POSITION IN SOUTH LEBANON AND NOW OCCUPIES A STRIP ABOUT 5 TO 10 KM WIDE STRETCHING THE ENTIRE LENGTH OF THE ISRAELI-LEBANESE BORDER. THE ISRAELIS ON MARCH 16 TOOK RASHAYYA AL FUKHKHAR. MOST FIGHTING IS NOW CONCENTRATED IN THE ARQUB REGION AND ISRAELI FORCES ARE THREATENING HASBAYA, ACCORDING TO REPORTS REACHING BEIRUT.

B. YASIR ARAFAT TOLD THE PRESS MARCH 16 THAT HE WAS LEAVING BEIRUT FOR SOUTH LEBANON "TO FIGHT ALONGSIDE THE PALESTINIAN AND LEBANESE MILITANTS." HE LABELLED THE ISRAELI ATTACK "AMERICAN INSPIRED AGGRESSION" CARRIED OUT "WITH THE COLLUSION OF CERTAIN ARAB COUNTRIES." HE ADDED THAT THE UNITED STATES "CANNOT IMPOSE ON US AN AGREEMENT THAT WE DO NOT WANT."

C. THE PALESTINIAN NEWS AGENCY (Wafa) REPORTED ON MARCH 16 THAT CASUALTIES OF "THE JOINT FORCES" WERE "79 FIGHTERS KILLED OR WOUNDED AND A NUMBER OF WEAPONS AND MILITARY EQUIPMENT DESTROYED." Wafa SAID CIVILIAN CASUALTIES WERE 150 PEOPLE KILLED OR WOUNDED AND 80 MISSING. Wafa ALSO CLAIMED THAT ISRAELI LOSSES WERE 350 MEN KILLED OR WOUNDED, ONE SKYHAWK DOWNED AND 70-80 TANKS AS WELL AS 20 OTHER ARMORED VEHICLES DESTROYED. (ISRAEL HAS ADMITTED 11 SOLDIERS KILLED
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AND 57 WOUNDED, ACCORDING TO THE BEIRUT PRESS.)

D. SYRIA ON MARCH 15 AGREED TO PUT "SUFFICIENT MEANS OF AIR DEFENSE" AT THE DISPOSITION OF THE ARAB DETERRENT FORCES, ACCORDING TO AN ADF COMMUNIQUE. AMERICAN OBSERVERS HAD CLEARLY SEEN SYRIAN AND PALESTINIAN ANTI-AIRCRAFT FORCES OPENING FIRE ON THE ATTACKING ISRAELI AIRCRAFT AT AL AWZA'I ON MARCH 15.

3. SITUATION IN BEIRUT.

A. EVENING OF MARCH 16 EMBOFFS OBSERVED ARMED MILITIA AND UNMARKED MACHINEGUN MOUNTED VEHICLES (ONE ON THE CORNICHE PASSED THE AMERICAN EMBASSY) IN AYN MREISSE AND THE HAMRA AREA OF WEST BEIRUT. THERE WAS VIRTUALLY NO CIVILIAN TRAFFIC ON THE STREETS.

B. MORNING OF MARCH 17, HOWEVER, EMBOFFS SAW NO ARMED MILITIA IN HAMRA AND MREISSE. TRAFFIC WAS NORMAL AND STORES HAD REOPENED. THERE WERE STILL ARMED MEN, PRESUMABLY FATAH FEDAYEEN, ALONG THE BEACH NEAR THE AIRPORT AND AROUND THE PERIMETER OF SHATILA CAMP.

4. REFUGEES FROM THE SOUTH.

A. TYRE IS A VIRTUAL GHOST TOWN, ACCORDING TO THE PRESS. REFUGEES FROM THE SOUTH HAVE BEEN ARRIVING IN WEST BEIRUT AND SIDON. IN WEST BEIRUT, THEY HAVE BEEN ILLEGALLY OCCUPYING APARTMENTS, PRIMARILY IN RAOUCHE AND RAMLIT AL BAYDA. DURING THE AFTERNOON AND EVENING OF MARCH 16, THERE WERE A NUMBER OF GUN-FIGHTS IN WEST BEIRUT INVOLVING THE REFUGEES.

B. THE NEW REFUGEES ARE IN ADDITION TO PERHAPS 100,000 REFUGEES DISPLACED FROM THE SOUTH DURING OTHER FIGHTING SINCE 1975.

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5. CHRISTIAN POSITIONS.

A. PIERRE GEMAYEL TOLD THE PRESS ON MARCH 15 THAT THE PALESTINIANS WERE "RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE SOUTH," ACCORDING TO THE LOCAL PRESS. IN A SIMILAR VEIN ON MARCH 16, CAMILLE CHAMOUN SAID THAT "THOSE WHO HAVE OCCUPIED THE SOUTH FOR A LONG TIME ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT HAS HAPPENED."

B. FORMER PRESIDENT SULAYMAN FRANJIYAH SOMEWHAT MORE EQUIVOCALLY REMARKED THAT "ISRAELI AGGRESSION" HAD ADDED TO LEBANON'S PROBLEM OF "PALESTINIAN AGGRESSION." FRANJIYAH ALSO ATTACKED "MAJOR FRIENDLY STATES" WHICH VOICED SUPPORT FOR LEBANON, BUT DID NOTHING TO HELP HER. HE SINGLED OUT U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE VANCE AS "MISERLY" TOWARDS LEBANON FOLLOWING THE LATEST ISRAELI ATTACK, ACCORDING TO THE ENGLISH DAILY IKE.

6. PARLIAMENT MEETS.

PARLIAMENT MET IN CLOSED SESSION ON MARCH 16 TO DISCUSS THE ISRAELI INVASION OF SOUTH LEBANON, BUT WAS UNABLE TO AGREE ON A RESOLUTION AS DEPUTIES CLASHED IN ACRIMONIOUS DEBATE OVER WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE. THE SESSION WAS ADJOURNED UNTIL MARCH 19. IN THE PAST AFTER ISRAELI INCURSIONS, PARLIAMENT HAS ROUTINELY MET AND ISSUED A COMMUNIQUE REAFFIRMING THE DEPUTIES SUPPORT FOR THE COUNTRY'S UNITY AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MILITARY ASSISTANCE, POLITICAL SITUATION, MILITARY EXERCISES, COMBAT OPERATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 17 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978BEIRUT01437
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780119-0173
Format: TEL
From: BEIRUT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780357/aaaabvrb.tel
Line Count: 166
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 62a317c5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 BEIRUT 1403
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 29 mar 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3297211
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: LEBANESE SITUATION, MARCH 17, 1200 HOURS LOCAL
TAGS: PINS, PINT, MILI, ASEC, MOPS, MASS, LE, SY
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/62a317c5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014